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SUBJECT: JAAFARI'S VEIL DANCE OF IMPERFECTLY-CONCEALED PM AMBITION

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a December 12 meeting, former Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari warned that the USG will be able to conclude a long-term bilateral security arrangement only with an Iraqi leader who has a solid base of popular support and is able to explain the upside of the agreement to a skeptical Iraqi public. In his characteristically indirect and long-winded manner, Jaafari left little doubt that while in his own estimation he is precisely such a leader, Prime Minister al-Maliki most assuredly is not. Never once mentioning Maliki by name, Jaafari spent much of the meeting criticizing the GOI and chiding the USG for what he described as excessive dealing with politicians who do not represent the vision and will of the Iraqi people, would be defeated at the polls if elections were held today, and whose overriding interest is survival in power. He confided that 7 of the 27 mortar shells fired at the International Zone in a Thanksgiving Day barrage struck his house, injuring three staff members. End Summary.

Down on Maliki

¶2. (C) In reply to our statement that the recently-announced joint declaration of principles set forth a framework for negotiations over a comprehensive bilateral relationship that would reflect our shared interests, Jaafari cautioned that we would be able to come to agreement over such a relationship only with a leader who has a solid base of popular support and can explain the advantages of the relationship to the Iraqi people who remain grateful to the USG for toppling Saddam but retain long-standing "sensitivities" about relations with America. Without mentioning PM Maliki's name during the entire meeting and referring only to "the government," he claimed the GOI had done a poor job of informing the Iraqi public about the joint declaration, and implied that the GOI had been disingenuous in its dealings with the U.S. "Did they ever tell the Iraqi people that you are here to protect them from al-Qaeda," he asked rhetorically, adding that while GOI officials told the USG they were happy with the joint declaration "they then turned around and talked only about their red lines to the local media. Are these really the people who you want to negotiate a long-term relationship with?"

¶3. (C) Warming to the anti-Maliki message that he delivered and then re-phrased repeatedly throughout the meeting, the voluble Jaffari rattled off the perceived errors of the current government: inability to fill vacant cabinet positions; poor relations with neighboring states; lack of "strategic vision;" failure to explain policies to the Iraqi people or take popular attitudes into account when formulating such policies; mismanagement of the "Awakening" movement which allowed the Coalition to engage in "unequal treatment" by mobilizing thousands of Sunnis in Anbar - "the home of terrorism" - while at the same time attacking Sadr

city; and marginalization of Sunnis and exclusion of "real groups with a real popular base" through the Group of Four alignment, a grouping that does not reflect the will of the Iraqi people and does not enjoy public backing. He grudgingly conceded that the security environment had improved but was quick to caution that the situation was fragile and could be quickly destabilized and that the ISF remained weak.

The Great Must Occupy Positions of Greatness

¶4. (C) Hitting his stride, Jaafari offered the unsolicited advice that when USG officials meet Iraqi politicians, "you must ask yourself two questions: do these people have a base of popular support and do they represent the views of the Iraqi people?" Such people do not speak frankly to you, he claimed, and would not be re-elected if polls were held today because they have no popular base. Without further identification, the former physician opined that some Iraqi politicians don't believe in democracy but have a popular base, some believe in democracy but have no popular support, while still others only seek governmental power and believe only in their survival in power. Although we hear numerous credible reports that Jaafari is working overtime behind the scenes to oust Maliki and regain the PM position he once occupied, it is a testament to Jaafari's indirect and slippery rhetorical style that, just as he was careful to never mention Maliki by name, he avoided any discussion of his own ambitions and designs. Rather, he relied on the constant but implied comparison between himself and Maliki. The closest he came to revealing his ambition and perception of self came near the end of the meeting when he intoned dramatically that "the Iraqi people demand that the great

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ones among them occupy positions of greatness."

¶5. (C) Jaafari closed the meeting by confiding that his house had been struck by 7 of the 27 60mm mortars fired at the International Zone in a November 23 Thanksgiving Day barrage, injuring three staff members. After he asked that we provide information regarding the identity of the attackers and the location from where the attack was launched, we replied that we understood the attack had been attributed to elements of Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mehdi (JAM) militia. Ironically, Jaafari has come in for criticism in the past for his perceived cultivation of Sadr and his followers.

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